

THE VETO MESSAGE IS FILED

MAYOR HERMAN WISE GOES ON RECORD AND HEDGES AGAINST THE MISCHANCE OF AN OIL-FED CONFLAGRATION.

The Astorian offers the full text of Mayor Herman Wise's veto message nullifying the ordinance repealing the ordinance requiring the oil companies to remove their storage tanks beyond the limits of the City of Astoria.

Mayor Wise has left no ground for discussion as to the stand he takes for public safety of life and property and it will never be fully appreciated until the crucial hour of accident arrives. His premises are absolutely correct, and if the ordinance to repeal shall pass over this veto, the burden of responsibility will lie upon clearly defined shoulders that will never shake off the crushing incubus. The lines are sharply drawn.

Astoria, Or. Feb. 27, 1907.

Gentlemen of the Common Council: I herewith return, without my approval an ordinance (to repeal ordinance 3821) entitled "an ordinance to prohibit the erection and maintenance of oil tanks, etc." because it aims to repeal an ordinance passed for the protection of the city against explosions and fires, without substituting any other protective ordinance in its place. No business man would cancel one fire insurance policy before securing another at least as good. It is said another ordinance can be passed, very well, but until it is passed the old ordinance must stand.

It is suggested that retaining walls be built around the tanks; personally I should prefer to see these big tanks removed outside of the city limits, because retaining walls will, in my opinion, prove inadequate in an emergency. However, it is at least some protection, and in as much as the canners and grocers seem so worked up by the threats of the Standard Oil Company to move away, and since a number of our best people have been induced to petition this honorable body for redress, I am willing to meet them more than half way, but the walls must be strong enough, high and thick enough and removed far enough from the tanks to stay the progress of the rushing, burning fluid, —at least, until the small property owners and dealers have had a chance to save some of their belongings.

The oil companies never got permission from the city to erect these tanks, in fact, they settled in the midst of the manufacturing district against the protest of the people as voiced by the press at that time. How can we expect additional manufacturing enterprises to erect plants in that district under such circumstances? It is said the oil companies will leave the city if this ordinance is not repealed; supposing the railroad company should threaten to leave this city unless the speed regulating ordinance is repealed? If it has come to the point where this city can no longer pass ordinances for the protection of its people or the peoples property, then let our charter go with the Port of Columbia Bill and let our city be governed by the oil companies' agents at Portland.

It is also argued that gasoline tanks would be scattered all along the water front if the oil companies moved away; it seems to me the council would have the power to regulate by ordinance the storage of such tanks.

It is all very well for big enterprises to say that they are not afraid of fire. Some at least, as I understand, have good reason to be unafraid, but how is it with the small property owner, and store keeper who has no one to help him carry the burden of insurance? and insurance here is very high, making it impossible to cover much more than half of the value of the stocks and buildings.

The oil companies have employees to circulate petitions, they bring influence to bear on their customers and upon public officials; the owners of small homes or stores have neither the time, nor the inclination to petition, nor to threaten, they depend upon us, their servants, to protect their several interests.

During a similar controversy in Portland a little over three years ago, the manufacturing enterprises in the vicinity of the oil tanks collected proof of the destructiveness and dangers of oil fires; the originals of which I have in my possession, subject to

your examination. After a long and bitter fight a committee was appointed, consisting of Major Langfitt, United States Engineers, Mr. Stillman of the Board of Fire Underwriters and Councilman Flegel, who after careful consideration recommended, as I am informed, that some of the largest tanks be removed to Portsmouth near St. Johns, and that substantial retaining walls be built around others.

Here are extracts from the evidence produced in Portland which I have carefully studied and to which I respectfully call your attention.

Major J. L. Phillips of Springfield, Ill., wrote: "The Standard Oil Company has voluntarily moved the oil plants outside of the city limits."

"The City Council of Danville, Ill., ordered the Standard Oil Company outside of the city limits, and merchants are getting oil and gasoline at Westville, a few miles from Danville."

Mr. Stillman of the Fire Underwriters stated to the Portland Council: "The warehouses in Portland are bad risks because built upon piling."

From New Orleans, La.: "The Standard Oil Company raised the price of oil so high that the industrial plants had to discontinue the use of oil and return to the use of coal for fuel."

"Fire at the piers of the National Storage Company at Bayonne loss \$500,000, the fire tugs had to turn streams upon themselves to keep from burning."

"Pipe line near Bond Brook, N. J., burst, the oil flowed over the ground after the pipe line had been repaired the division superintendent, Mr. Urban, ordered to fire the oil spread over the ground; this fire burned furiously in the midst of a heavy rain."

"Fire at 465 to 475 East 10th street, New York City, during the fire a fireman threw a burning window sash into the water near the Standard Oil tanks, in an instant there was a flash, and with lightning like rapidity the fire followed the course of the oil upon the water."

"Lightning struck a tank of crude oil at Constable Hook, N. J., the oil caught fire, flames spread to nearby tanks, the oil spread to waters edge, burning so rapidly that people living near by had to run out of their homes partially dressed, the firemen could not work more than a few minutes at a time, the loss is between one and two million dollars; several firemen are in the hospital injured by burning oil; the firemen could do very little with the flames. They finally dug trenches, but the burning oil passed even over many of these trenches; it was finally found that the fire could be fought with steam better than with water. The fire burned fifty-six hours."

From the Oregonian: "Minneapolis, April 24th, 1903, eight men and two women were killed by an explosion of the oil companies tank, at the foot of 6th avenue, the explosion came without an instant warning and a second after the concussion the walls had been thrown down and the entire structure was a mass of flames; not a person in the office escaped alive. It is expected that sparks from a switch engine ignited the inflammable fluids."

Oregonian March 7th, 1903: "At Tonesta, Pennsylvania, a man ran into the river to escape the fire, but the burning fluid surrounded the man, and he was burned to death."

May 11th, "The oil tanks of the Standard Oil Company blew up at the foot of 10th street, the blazing oil flowed into Tracks Creek, where barges were moored; some of them caught fire, others were removed by tugs; the entire New York fire department was kept busy fighting the flames. One man is missing and supposed to be killed by the explosion."

Here are extracts from a letter by the Honorable John H. Lewman, H City Attorney at Danville, Ill.

"The Danville City Council passed an ordinance prohibiting the storing of oils in quantities within one thousand feet of a residence, store or other building. The Standard Oil Company, a year after this ordinance passed located its storage plant in the outskirts of the City, since then the city has grown to such an extent that the plant was within a thickly populated district, suit was brought against the company and the case was fought thru the supreme court, which held the ordinance valid. The company took its delivery tanks and wagons out of service, and compelled the merchants to resort to primitive methods to handle oil. The company sent its employees with a petition which was signed by the users of oil, there was no other demands for the repeal of the ordinance. The council therefore, refused to repeal the ordinance, and the

action of the council met with the hearty approval of the citizens of the city. The company attempted to create a scarcity or an oil famine, out drew in their horns when local dealers and outside independent companies began to supply the trade with oil at a less price than the Standard Oil Co. had been charging."

A fire insurance agent at Portland receives a letter from a party at Beaumont, Tex. in which he says: "Each fire was caused thru the careless handling of lamps and lanterns. Men here are surprised when I tell them that Portland has allowed storage tanks in the heart of the city. They consider a storage tank as hazardous, if not more so than a powder magazine, it is destructive to life and property, when it catches on fire. The city of New Orleans has passed very stringent laws governing the oil question. If any of your councilmen had ever seen an oil fire, such as we had, I can assure you no one would have been able to place a storage tank inside of your city limits."

From the New York Press, referring to a suit pending in the courts, that the railway agents said the business was too dangerous, the dripping oil might catch fire in the terminals and burn up railroad sheds, trains of freight and whole terminals, there was no telling what damage might not happen to property and lives. I have a letter from a business house in Portland in which it says: "We had a fire last July in the Union Oil Co. tanks located on the river just above St. Johns. One of the tanks exploded and resulted in a disastrous conflagration. It came near burning our new fire boat; it was badly scorched and lost over 2,000 feet of hose; they had to abandon every thing to save themselves. When the oil strikes the water it floats around in very and all directions. If they came get anyone in your town to sign a petition those people certainly know not what they are doing. I consider it more dangerous in your city than almost any other on the coast, for the reason that the great majority of your business houses are built on piling and in the event of an oil fire, wherein the oil would run down underneath it would cause almost certain destruction to your whole water front."

There are also letters signed by the agents of the following insurance companies, addressed to various business firms in Portland in which they say that the insurance rates would be raised materially unless the fire tanks were regulated: Underwriters Bureau, New York, to the representative of the board of Fire Underwriters at Portland, to the agents of the North-British and Mercantile Co., the Atlas, the Aetna, the Sun, Phoenix, Home, Fire and Marine, Alliance, Manchester, Aachen, Munich, Royal insurance companies and others.

I also had a conversation recently with Mayor Wallace at Albany, Or., who told me that the council had permitted the erection of a medium sized oil tank at the railroad depot, but that he was sorry now, since he heard of the oil tank explosion at Junction, near Eugene, and let us remember that the depot at Albany is a considerable distance removed from the business section, that the depot and surrounding country is upon earth and much less dangerous than a business section built upon piling. In view of all the facts herein enumerated I submit that we should at least provide a substitute, however poor, for the old ordinance before we repeal it entirely. Some of you have probably been subjected to the same criticism, the same indirect insults and the same threats as I have been worried with recently, but he who expects the honors of a public office, must bear his share of the worries and responsibilities of the post. The loss of selfish friends or of unreasonable customers, is to me preferable to the loss of the people's confidence.

Should, God forbid, an explosion or running oil fire destroy even a portion of the peoples property, we would justly merit and receive the condemnation of a trusting constituency. Let me therefore respectfully and earnestly beg of you gentlemen to sustain this veto of the repeal ordinance until another regulating ordinance shall have taken its place.

HERMAN WISE, Mayor.

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Mary A. Adair to S. D. Adair, 2 1-2 block 54, Adairs Port of Upper Astoria, 1
F. L. Verstine, et al. to Geo. L. and J. A. McPherson, sectional land, Oregon, 24,000
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United States to Andrew Nelson, 40 acres, Sec. 20-7-7 100
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Kund Rasmussen and wife to John Frye, 69 acres, Sec. 11-7-10 W. 100

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